

A methodological analysis of experimental philosophy based on selected examples

ABSTRACT

Experimental philosophy (often referred to as 'x-phi') is a new current in modern analytic philosophy that has gained much popularity in recent years. The followers of this approach point at the fact that philosophers often make empirically testable predictions about non-philosophers' reactions to certain philosophical thought experiments. In order to test these claims, experimental philosophers adopt survey and experimental methods commonly used in social sciences and attempt at collecting information on non-philosophers' intuitions concerning different philosophical problems. The main aim of this dissertation is to provide a detailed, critical analysis of the novel methodological proposal promoted by experimental philosophers.

Chapter I is a short introduction to experimental philosophy. In this chapter, I identify and characterize the methodological solution specific to x-phi studies – *the scenario method*. I explain the links between experimental philosophy and some classic approaches in philosophy, such as conceptual analysis and the method of thought experiments. I also discuss the diversity of research aims within experimental philosophy and present a classification of branches of experimental philosophy that can be drawn basing on such differences.

Chapter II is devoted to the first major objection raised by the opponents of experimental philosophy – *the expertise argument*. According to this line of reasoning, data collected in x-phi studies are philosophically irrelevant, since nearly all experiments focus on non-philosophers' intuitions. The proponents of the expertise arguments claim that when one considers philosophical problems, one should rather refer to intuitions shared by experts on the matter – professional philosophers. However, basing on the results of some recent studies, I argue that these expectations towards philosophers are likely to be incorrect.

In Chapter III, I present and analyze another objection against experimental philosophy – *the argument from quality of intuitions*, according to which methods used by experimental philosophers do not guarantee revealing intuitions of the desired kind and because of that, the collected data may not be philosophically significant. I analyze different variants of this argumentative strategy and consider different methodological solutions adopted in experimental philosophy that might be sources of such problems. Finally, I argue that the objection suggesting that the results of x-phi studies are often affected not only by semantic factors, but also by pragmatic factors, is the strongest potential threat for the methodological proposal promoted by experimental philosophers. The claim that the data collected in x-phi studies are usually shaped by pragmatic phenomena, and it is difficult to experimentally isolate the influence of pragmatic and semantic factors on non-philosophers' judgments, is the main thesis defended in this dissertation.

In Chapters IV and V, I present empirical data collected in my own experiments which support the abovementioned thesis. Chapter IV regards the results of x-phi studies concerning contextualism. Previous studies suggest that the outcomes are more favorable to contextualism in the case of within-subject experimental design than in the case of between-subject experimental design. Basing on the results of my studies and provided interpretation of the abovementioned difference in terms of pragmatic phenomena, I argue against using within-subject design in experiments concerning contextualism. Chapter V focuses on x-phi studies regarding reference of proper names. I suggest that the method of measuring folk intuitions on this issue adopted in previous studies – narrow forced choice – may be a source of serious problems. Referring to the results of my experiments, I argue that data collected in previous studies on this topic may not be only shaped by participants' semantic considerations (as intended by the researchers) but also by their reactions to some superficial characteristics of the stimuli driven by pragmatic mechanisms.

Apart from arguing in support of the main thesis, the dissertation provides many analyses of different methodological solutions used in experimental philosophy, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, and suggests some solutions that might help making experimental philosophy a more successful scientific endeavor.